

Waterfowl Management In Alabama

Alabama Guide Sheet No. AL 645E



Twenty-six species of ducks are found in the coastal and inland waters of Alabama. The wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) and the hooded merganser (*Mergus cucullatus*) occur statewide throughout the year and breed extensively in Alabama.

Habitat Management

Habitat management consists of retaining and managing suitable food, cover, and water. The production of fall and winter foods is especially important, since winter is the time when Alabama sees the most species of waterfowl. This frequently involves planting crops that mature in late summer and flooding them from early fall to late winter. Areas such as beaver ponds, marshes, coastal flats, natural and man-made ponds, and other wetlands serve as habitat and food sources. Trees with cavities suitable for wood duck nests should be protected. Nest boxes should be cleaned and serviced at least once a year, preferably around January 1. See Alabama Guidesheet AL 645F: Wood Duck Nesting Boxes for additional information.

Creating Habitat

Beaver Ponds

Beaver ponds that contain an acre or more of shallow water, mostly dead trees in the shallow margins and buttonbush, alder, or emergent waterweeds provide excellent habitat. They must contain live streams to ensure water for flooding during early fall.

Moist soil management is conducted on agricultural lands or other open areas where water can be impounded or regulated by a dike with a water control structure.

To insure that foods are available to dabbling ducks, the impoundment should gradually be flooded to depths of 6-18 inches. Consider the effects of the timing of flooding and drawdown on the plant species composition. The table listed below depicts a generic management system. This could be adjusted based upon individual needs and trials with local situations and conditions.

Duck Fields

Duck fields should contain at least two level acres that are suited to growth of duck foods. The soils should have a high water holding capacity and be located near a dependable water supply. Dikes may be constructed as needed. Install a water control structure large enough to prevent flooding for more than two days after heavy summer rains. Plant at least two acres of corn, browntop millet, dove proso, grain sorghum, or Japanese millet. Flood the area in the fall, 15 inches or less, after the seed matures.

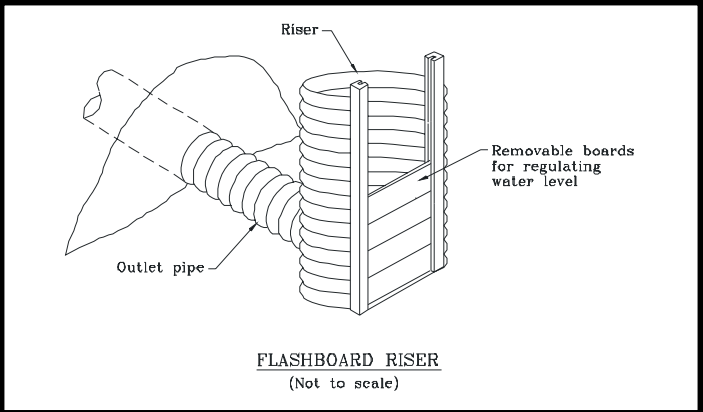
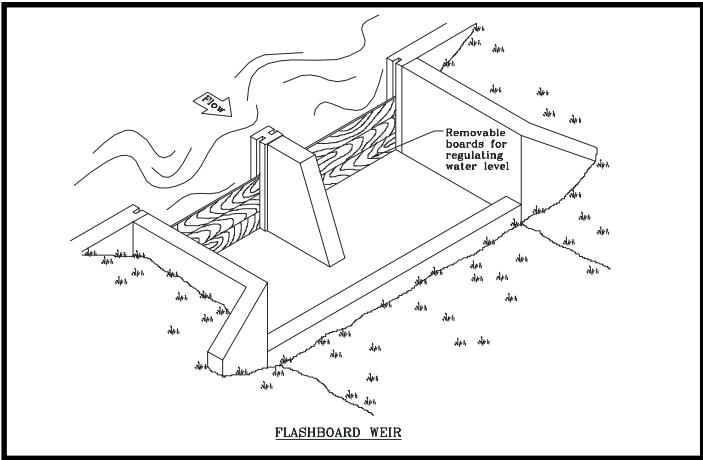
Green Tree Reservoirs

Green tree reservoirs are areas of bottomland hardwoods around which dikes have been constructed. The hardwoods are flooded only from early fall to late winter. Acorns are then available to ducks, especially mallards, wood ducks, and black ducks. Green tree reservoirs should have a good stand of mast producing trees, preferably water oak, willow oak, nuttall oak, cherrybark oak and shumard oak. The area should be level, have soils with a high water holding capacity and located near a dependable water source. Construct dikes as needed and install a water level control structure large enough to drain the area within one week. Thin stands to remove undesirable trees. Open areas

should be planted in corn, browntop millet, dove proso, grain sorghum, or Japanese millet. Flood from early October 15 to March 1, or during the dormant season of the hardwoods. Flooding should be to 15 inches or less to prevent damage or death to the trees. Continual flooding will kill most species of trees. Draining the pond during every growing season and flooding only two out of three consecutive years, or every other year, will maintain the trees indefinitely.

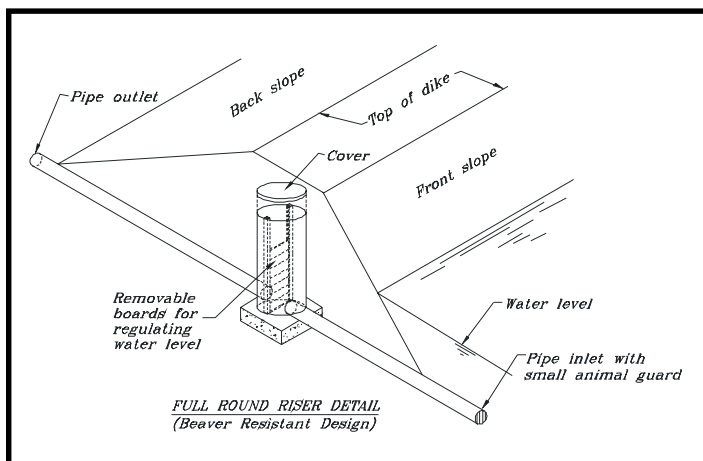
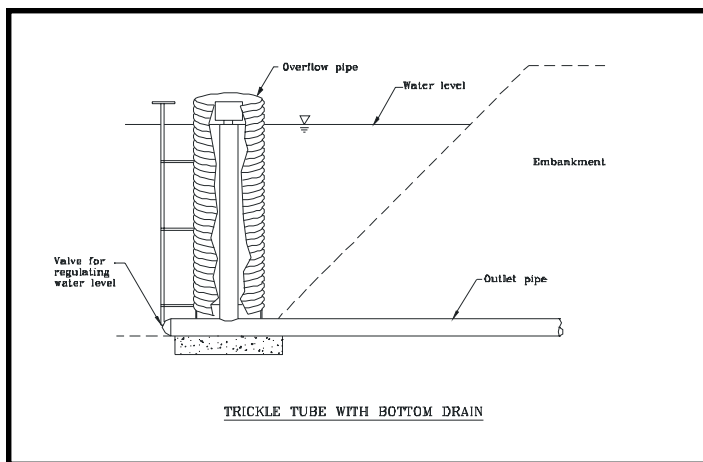
Water Control Structures

In order to manipulate water levels and simulate natural hydrologic regimes it is important to properly place water control structures. Structures should be placed at the lowest elevation in the impoundment and be large enough to permit complete dewatering. Stoplog structures have proven to be the most effective design because desired changes in the water depth can be achieved with appropriately sized stoplogs and water depths can be maintained with a minimum of monitoring. Topography and size of the impoundment should determine the number and size of water control structures.



Management of Native Plants in Moist Soil	
<u>Activity</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>
Flooding Schedule (to full pool)	Early November
Draining Schedule (down to permanent pool)	Begin between March 1 and May 1. Use slow drawdown period, 21-30 days
Ground Preparation	None
Seeding Rates	First year may require seeding to browntop millet, none thereafter. Seed only if a natural seed bank is not present.
Fertilization Rates	None required
Maturation Date	September to October
Control of Undesirable Plants	Treat impoundment with approved herbicides or disk selected areas when levels of broadleaf or woody species reach 10-20 percent of the pool area.
NOTE: Two weeks of flooding in summer may control undesirable weeds. These are generic recommendations. Actual management activities should be based upon local situations and site conditions.	

Plantings for Duck Fields				
Crop	Seeding Rates/Acre	Planting Dates		
		North	Central	South
Browntop Millet	25 lbs. Broadcast	May 1-Aug. 1	April 1- Aug. 15	April 1-Aug. 15
Corn	7-10 lbs. Rows	April 1- May 10	March 20- April 20	March 1- April 10
Dove Proso Millet	25 lbs. Broadcast	May 1- Aug. 1	April 1- Aug. 15	April 1- Aug. 15
Grain Sorghum	4-8 lbs. wide rows	May 1- Aug. 1	April 15- Aug. 1	April 1- Aug. 15
Japanese Millet	25 lbs. Broadcast	May 1- Aug. 1	May 1- Aug. 1	May 1-Aug. 1



is allowed over lands where either a normal agricultural planting, harvesting and post-harvesting manipulation or normal soil stabilization has occurred. Agricultural practices must be conducted in accordance with official recommendations of State Extension Specialists of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

3. Hunting of any migratory game bird, including doves, is allowed over lands planted by means of top sowing or aerial seeding if seeds are present solely as the result of a *normal agricultural planting* or a *normal soil stabilization* practice.
4. Hunting is allowed of any migratory bird over manipulated natural vegetation without any restrictions. This rule excludes planted millet from the term natural vegetation. Millet that grows on its own in subsequent years is considered natural vegetation that can be manipulated at any time without restriction.
5. Hunting over grains that are inadvertently scattered from standing or flooded standing crops solely as the result of a hunter entering or exiting a hunting area, placing decoys, or retrieving downed birds is allowed.
6. The take of migratory birds from a blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with natural vegetation is allowed as well as using agricultural crops for the purpose of concealment or camouflage as long as the use of such does not result in the exposing, depositing, or scattering of grain or other feed.
7. A baited area remains off limits to hunting for 10 days after all salt, grain, or other feed has been completely removed.

It is legal to hunt migratory game birds on, over, or from:

- Standing crops or flooded standing crops, including aquatic plants
- Standing, flooded, or manipulated natural vegetation
- Flooded harvested croplands
- Lands or areas where grains have been scattered solely as the result of a normal agricultural harvesting or normal agricultural post-harvest manipulation.
- Lands or areas where top-sown seeds have been scattered solely as the result of a normal agricultural

Waterfowl Regulations

This document is for guidance purposes only. Anyone managing a site where hunting will take place should check all state and federal laws pertaining to the taking of migratory waterfowl.

According to US Fish and Wildlife Service, effective July 6, 1999, the following regulations should be noted:

1. The current regulation prohibits taking of migratory game birds by the aid of baiting or on or over any baited area, if the person knows or reasonably should know that the area is a baited area. In addition, it is now a separate offense to place or direct the placement of bait on or adjacent to an area for the purpose of causing, inducing, or allowing any person to take or attempt to take any migratory game bird by the aid of baiting on or over the baited area.
2. A current distinction is made between agricultural practices allowed for waterfowl, cranes, and coots and practices allowed for other migratory game birds such as doves and pigeons. The hunting of any migratory bird including waterfowl, cranes, and coots

planting, or a planting for agricultural soil erosion control or post-mining land reclamation.

- From a blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with natural vegetation.
- From a blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with vegetation from agricultural crops, provided your use of such vegetation does not expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter grain or other feed. You should be aware that seeds of grains from such vegetation could create a baited area.
- On or over standing or flooded standing agricultural crops where grain is inadvertently scattered solely as the result of hunters entering or leaving the area, placing decoys, or retrieving downed birds. Hunters are cautioned that while conducting these activities, any intentional scattering of grains will create a baited area.

Definition of Terms

Normal agricultural planting, harvesting, or post harvesting manipulation means a planting or harvesting undertaken for the purpose of producing and gathering a crop, or manipulation after such harvest and removal of grain, that is conducted in accordance with official recommendations of State Extension Specialists of Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Normal agricultural operation means a normal agricultural planting, harvesting, post-harvesting manipulation or agricultural practice, that is conducted in accordance with official recommendations of State Extension Specialists of Cooperative Extension System.

Normal soil stabilization practice means a planting for agricultural soil erosion control or post-mining land reclamation conducted in accordance with official recommendations of State Extension Specialists of Cooperative Extension System.

Baited area means any area on which salt, grain, or other feed has been placed, exposed, deposited, distributed, or scattered, if that salt, grain, or other feed

could serve as a lure or attraction for migratory game birds on or over areas where hunters are attempting to take them. Any such area will remain a baited area for 10 days following the complete removal of all such salt, grain, or other feed.

Baiting means the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of salt, grain, or other feed that could serve as a lure or attraction for migratory game birds on or over any area where hunters are attempting to take them.

Manipulation means the alteration of natural vegetation or agricultural crops by activities that include but are not limited to mowing, shredding, disking, rolling, chopping, trampling, flattening, burning, or herbicide treatments. The term manipulation does not include the distributing or scattering of grain, seed, or other feed after removal from or storage on the field where grown.

Natural vegetation means any non-agricultural, native, or naturalized plant species that grows at a site in response to planting or from existing seeds or other propagules. The term natural vegetation does not include planted millet. However, planted millet that grows on its own in subsequent years after the year of planting is considered natural vegetation.

References

- Jackson, Jefferey. Managing Wetlands for Waterfowl in the Southeast: Bring Ducks to Your Land.
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- US Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior. Migratory Bird Hunting: Regulations Regarding Baiting and Baited Areas. Federal Register 64: 29799-20804.
- Waters, R.E. Some Things You Should Know About Wildlife in Alabama. Alabama Forestry Planning Committee.

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